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THE UNPREPARED RECITATION IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

In the report of the Committee of Ten (p. 48) is the following paragraph :

“In the construction of the sample programmes the Committee adopted twenty as the maximum number of weekly periods, but with two qualifications, namely: that at least five of the twenty periods should be given to unprepared work, and that laboratory subjects should have double periods whenever that prolongation should be possible.”

The fact that the Committee ask for twenty recitations a week has fully impressed itself upon readers of the report, but the accompanying fact that at least five of these recitations are to be unprepared has in some cases been unnoticed, misunderstood or forgotten. Thus Dr. Ray Greene Huling, in the *SCHOOL REVIEW* for December 1894 (p. 600), after commenting upon the fact that the Committee ask for twenty exercises a week, and that the usual programmes have only about fifteen, says: “The Report calls, therefore, for one-third more work than the schools now provide for.”

Now no programme can be understood without some postulate as to the number of hours of home study expected from pupils. What is the amount of home study expected at present in the best third of our high schools? Probably two hours a school day during the first two years, and three hours a day during the last two. If the school session is of 5 hours, and of this 20 minutes are taken for recess and 10 minutes for opening exercises, there will remain during the first two years of the course, $6\frac{1}{2}$ hours of school work in every 24 hours of each school day. Under the usual system at present, the three recitation periods of 45 minutes each will take $2\frac{1}{4}$ hours, leaving $4\frac{1}{4}$ hours for the preparation of three recitations or about 1 hour and

25 minutes for each. With the proposed four recitations of the Committee's programmes only $3\frac{1}{2}$ hours will remain, if the time of home study remains the same. If the same time be given to the preparation of each of the fifteen prepared lessons as now, only 45 minutes will be added to the pupil's working day or one-ninth of his present time, not one-third as Mr. Huling puts it. But the Committee do not anywhere intimate that they expect the good high schools to require a larger amount of daily labor than they now require. They do say that the new programmes are harder than those of the average high school, but they evidently consider that the *average* high school is at present asking too little home work of its student. They do expect, too, that time expended will be put into serious and productive effort and not into short information courses pursued "excursively and not requiring intense application." See Mr. MacDonald in the Massachusetts School Report for 1893-4, p. 255, and also the Report of the Committee, p. 52.

Another misapprehension seems to arise from the mistaken supposition that the colleges are to require just what they do now in every subject, while making the large additions in the sciences which are certainly prescribed by the Classical and Latin-Scientific programmes of the Committee. We have statements that these programmes require more than the colleges are at present receiving for admission. In reply to such an objection, Mr. Tetlow, one of the Committee, said at the October, 1894 meeting of the New England Association of Colleges and Preparatory Schools: "These programmes clearly do not make demands in excess of the present requirements for admission to college in some directions, notably in Greek. The interpretation put by the colleges on the contents of these programmes will be clear when the colleges come to frame examinations under them; until that time I think we can afford not to be apprehensive" (SCHOOL REVIEW, Dec. 1894, p. 661). The last sentence above contains a complete answer to the objection. How much work these programmes require cannot be known until they are tried, and this all the more because they try an experiment in programme mak-

ing, viz., the increase of the usual number of recitations combined with the comparatively novel feature for this country of making one-fourth of all the recitations unprepared. It is evidently understood by Mr. Tetlow and President Eliot that the colleges must be brought to make whatever modifications in their requirements may be found necessary.

Since what immediately precedes was written it has received confirmation from the Report of the N. E. Association of Colleges and Preparatory Schools for 1895. A "Proposed Statement of Requirements" in Latin and Greek from the Commission of Colleges in New England is there given. This statement presupposes five hours a week for four years. But in a note we find: "If the advanced examination in Latin composition is not required, the course may be reduced by one lesson a week in the third and fourth years" (SCHOOL REVIEW, Dec. 1895). The Committee of Ten require but four recitations in the third and fourth years, and it is clear that the framers of the proposed requirement have this in mind.

The most serious objection raised against the twenty-recitation plan is that voiced by Agent J. W. MacDonald, of the State Board of Education of Massachusetts. He says (Mass. School Report for 1893-4, p. 257), "The conclusion of all this is that to carry out the plan of the Committee in a high school, however small, five teachers at least would be needed, and six to do the work well."

But in the first place the Committee do not expect small high schools to teach all the subjects of all the programmes (see Committee's Report, p. 39), as Mr. MacDonald's estimate would imply. A high school in which two teachers are employed may teach all four programmes for the first two years of a high school course. This is an entirely practicable arrangement. The Committee say (p. 48), "The first two years of any one of the four programmes presented above will, in the judgment of the Committee, be highly profitable by themselves to children who can go no farther." If children do wish to go farther (and many would wish it after two years of serious, well-directed study) they will find themselves with a good foundation for success in a larger

school. This larger school would frequently be some easily accessible city high school.

Again, all the four years of any one programme could be taught by three teachers, and these teachers would not have to work so hard as the two teachers upon the fifteen-recitation per week programmes. It may be frankly admitted that the restriction to a single course of study is an evil. But a small school at best cannot do all it would ; it must make a choice of evils. The admirable Latin-Scientific Course of the Committee of Ten would in many places meet the needs of four-fifths of the pupils, and the evils of restriction could be minimized for the remaining fifth in several ways.

It must be admitted that the proposal of the committee calls for a larger teaching force than at present. Can it be secured ? There are many reasons to believe so. Professor A. B. Hart of Harvard, himself a member of a school committee, in discussion before the N. E. Association of Colleges and Preparatory Schools at the last meeting said : "There is nothing for which the taxpayers so cheerfully expend their money as for their schools." There are many facts to support this most favorable judgment. The increased cost of maintaining schools, occasioned by the recent introduction of manual training and laboratory science is great, and is occasioned as well by the extra teaching force required as by equipment. In very many high schools the number of recitations required of a teacher has been reduced to twenty or even less. A recent visit of the writer to a large number of high schools in and near Chicago revealed the fact, to him surprising, that classes are being divided into small divisions, and this, too, in the face of great temptation to do otherwise owing to unexpected increase in the number of students. In no division visited was the number of students more than thirty, and in several cases classes of thirty-five or even less were divided into two divisions. A Beginning Latin class of one hundred and fifty was divided into five, not four divisions. In the State of Massachusetts at present out of 174 high schools having 90 or less pupils, 43 already have three or more teachers.

How shall the unprepared period be spent? As a fundamental proposition, it should be a time for teaching rather than for hearing pupils recite or, to put it in another way, a time for helping more prominently than for testing pupils. Every visitor to German schools tells of the time and pains taken in assigning lessons. The visitor to American high schools sees little time and pains taken in this. He often hears the teacher shout out the lesson for the next day after the last bell has struck and while the class is clattering off. It may be that the lesson thus hastily assigned contains some difficulty of exceptional character the surmounting of which has no educational value whatever, or perhaps a misprint in the text-book in use may cause the pupil a half hour of annoyance. The pupil should not be provided with crutches. On the other hand he should not be allowed to flounder in the mire when a helping hand extended will place him on the king's highway.

A similar process may be followed in getting out an assigned lesson. The teacher should work with his pupils. Such a recitation in Latin was held this morning in the Morgan Park Academy. The class was one beginning Latin. The translation to be given in class an hour later was worked out, the teacher endeavoring at every word to call out from the pupil every particular which his previous experience had supplied and to guide thought by the most skillful questioning of which he was capable. The special emphasis of the hour was upon learning the special vocabulary of the lesson, because the teacher has learned that this class is just now weakest upon that point. Pupils were called upon, after the words had been used in the translation exercise, to pronounce them aloud from the special vocabulary, to note the derivation and the English words of kindred origin. Most of the mistakes were corrected by the pupils who made them, in answer to questions, and facts not given in the vocabulary were elicited. Concert pronunciation was used to fix the sounds. Finally individual study upon the vocabulary was required of every pupil in a perfectly quiet room for several minutes under the teacher's eye. After this, knowledge was tested both by asking

the words from English in Latin and from Latin into English, and it appeared that the work had been better done than when a day before a similar vocabulary had been learned without the immediate coöperation of the teacher. Many of the pupils saw that in their unguided work they had erred in three particulars: (1) In neglecting to pronounce the word aloud accurately and repeatedly. (2) In failing to notice its derivation. (3) In giving too little emphasis to its first and primitive meaning.

A very common fault in our high school recitations is for the teacher, the moment a mistake is made or the pupil says he does not know, to ask some one else for the answer. This may be done when the information desired is the mere memory of a fact or when the pupil has clearly neglected his lesson. But when neither of these things are true a nod of dissent and an instant given for another trial or a developing (not leading) question, or an inquiry fixing the attention upon one point more closely, will lead the pupil to reach the right result by his own effort, and perhaps suggest to him how to do this another time when a like difficulty recurs. To illustrate, the writer was recently present at a recitation in Cæsar when a pupil translated *pars aestatis supererat*, a part of the summer survived. Some one else was immediately asked and corrected the word "survived" by the word "remained." The next hour in Cicero precisely the same kind of a sentence elicited the same mistake and the same sort of correction. The teacher said "remained" was a better word but did not tell why, nor lead the pupil to see that "survive" is used as a rule in current English only when the subject is a person. Nothing was done to help the pupils to understand the fundamental idea that a Latin verb must be translated in harmony with the meaning of its subject, object or modifying adverb.

From this faulty method of conducting a recitation pupils very naturally get the idea that the only way to learn a thing is to be told it or to read the exact statement of it in a book. To put it in another way it is continuing into secondary education a method to some degree permissible in acquiring

the simple facts of elementary education. It behooves high school teachers who complain that grammar school teachers do not teach pupils to think to be self-critical on this very point.

Doubtless the method here criticised is sometimes persisted in from a confusion of thought between guiding and telling a pupil, between a Socratic dialogue and an information lecture. Nothing could be further from the purpose of this paper than to advocate anything like the latter. But the thoughtful and conscientious teacher ought to see that it is utterly unreasonable to expect independent thought during the later years of a high school course unless such thought has been patiently stimulated and guided step by step during the earlier years.

What has all this to do with the unprepared recitation? If you ask the average teacher why he does not take time to work with his pupils, he will answer that he must get over the assigned lesson and has time for little more. Why not, then, use one hour a week in each subject in this kind of work exclusively?

President Taylor of Vassar, one of the Committee of Ten, puts the purpose of the unprepared recitation well in his article in the *SCHOOL REVIEW* for April, 1894: "Twenty hours of recitation could not be thought of, save by a departure from the prevalent mode of thought in our schools. As a rule, it may be said, our schools have no place for the unprepared recitation, where the teacher leads, stimulates, inspires, as well as instructs." Then, speaking of the large number of recitations in the German gymnasium and French Lycée, he adds: "The teacher necessarily is the worker then, and the class studies with him, and the work is done *in school*. Let any one who wishes to mark the difference at this point between our own and the best continental systems, consult Part I of the Report of the Commissioner of Education for 1888-9."

President Taylor's expression, "prevalent mode of thought," in the above extract is a suggestive one. It will be difficult to introduce the unprepared recitation because our "prevalent mode

of thought" about the recitation in general is wrong, and the good effects of such a recitation may be covered by saying that it will gradually change the "prevalent mode of thought" about recitations in general. To get ourselves out of this "mode of thought" it would be far better to give one wholly unprepared recitation a week in each subject rather than to have some preparation for each of the twenty recitations with the idea that a shorter lesson may be recited more quickly leaving a part of each hour for working ahead with pupils. This looks reasonable, but in practice, owing to the force of habit, most of us would use the whole period or all but the ragged edge of it in hearing the assigned lesson. It is clear that a radical change in our mode of thinking can be brought about only by a radical and persistent change in our practice. If the teacher will only show reasonable docility in adopting this suggestion of the committee, he will soon find his feeling toward his work changing, and that he is becoming more of a worker himself in becoming more of a coworker with his students.

If the advantages outlined immediately above do not appeal to him, he may be willing to try the experiment for some other reasons.

1. Note that the increase in number of recitations, made possible, as President Taylor says, only by making some of these recitations unprepared, gives to all subjects a respectable showing in every programme. The smallest number of recitations per week is two, and as few recitations as this are the decided exception. English, so often neglected, has an average of about three recitations a week throughout the course.

2. It certainly does give each student a larger amount of time under the direct care of the teachers, and this is bound to please parents and make friends for the school.

3. It will increase the number of teachers and lighten duties connected with the general care of the school, such as keeping the records, consultation with parents, care of study hall, oversight of pupils at recess, etc. If you are in a small school where the increase of teachers from two to three

is made necessary, the division of the work into departments will be marvelously facilitated. The Latin-Scientific programme would permit the following departmental division: Latin and German, 29 recitations a week; English and History, 22 (if History is taken instead of Mathematics in the senior year); Mathematics and Sciences, 26 recitations. This is a natural and valuable division. Foreign languages form a real department and the teacher finds in German a valuable tool for the study of Latin. History supplies material for composition work and gives the understanding of environment so necessary in the study of English Literature and of allusions in that literature. Mathematics must be largely used in exact work in science and will greatly increase the efficiency of science teaching.

The increase in number of recitations may be very gradual, and the result of the experiment watched in the hands of those teachers most inclined to it, or of those departments best adapted to the unprepared work. If desirable the school may count the weekly exercises in drawing and music in the twenty recitations, decreasing the assignments of time elsewhere in the programmes, as may seem best in the particular case.

Every department will find the unprepared recitation a practicable thing. In foreign language the needs of beginners, and later the practice of sight translation, suggest the best direction to give it. In English it may be largely used for reading at sight or for exercises in composition upon matters previously studied or upon subjects of common knowledge and interest. In mathematics new subjects of importance may be consecutively and pretty completely unfolded, or time may be given to practice on a host of examples upon rules already expounded. In *laboratory* science the unprepared recitation period is spent in the laboratory in experimentation. In history the period may seem to be least available, but even here much time is needed to show pupils how to read a historical paragraph so as to get the meat out of it. Pupils must be taught by patient questioning to discriminate between more and less essential, and to make rapid and accurate condensation.

What has here been written may seem almost too self-evident to be written at all. To many teachers who have for years used, in all their recitations, the methods of stimulus and direction here outlined it may not seem worth while to print the suggestions contained in this article. Such teachers will need to go but a little way from home to find many who are hearing recitations, but not teaching. Something ought to be done to lead these to teach. The establishment of the unprepared recitation in secondary schools seems likely to be a help toward this end. Poor teachers cannot be legislated into good ones, but many teachers are inexperienced, or thoughtless, or lacking in resources rather than incorrigibly bad. For such, a rearrangement of work suggestive in itself and supported by so strong and well known a Report may do much.

It is proper to add that the writer has almost constantly, for about thirteen years, made use of recitations entirely unprepared—to a greater extent than ever during the last three years. The conviction produced by this experience has given birth to this article.

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